

Ants

Management & IPM Actions

Ants have several characteristics which make them easy to recognize. They have a very narrow "waist" like a wasp, usually with one or two small "bumps" on the stalk connecting the abdomen to the rest of the body. The antennae are prominently elbowed. (Termite antennae are straight, never elbowed.) The hind wings of adults are substantially shorter than the front wings. Most ants are wingless, but at certain times of the year, winged males and females may be seen swarming in great numbers. Swarms may appear in spring, summer, or fall, depending on the species.

Ants are one of the most exasperating insect pests encountered around the home. Ants may be found virtually anywhere -- crawling over all kinds of food in the kitchen, on plants which are covered with sticky, sweet honeydew secreted by aphids or mealybugs, on the bark of trees which have been wounded in some way, or in mounded nests in gardens or lawns. Various species eat particles of human foods, sweets, fats, seeds, dead insects, meats, or fungi.

Most ants commonly found in the Northeast do not pose a serious threat to human health or property. Although they are often considered pests in schools when they are found inside buildings, it is usually not advisable or effective to apply pesticides to floors or baseboards indoors or as a perimeter treatment outdoors against ants. A common sense approach to managing indoor infestations should be taken which emphasizes practicing good sanitation and building maintenance. Such an approach should keep ants from establishing foraging trails indoors for food and water.

Ants live in colonies, with different forms (castes) performing the various tasks necessary for survival. Some workers forage for food, while others tend to the needs of the developing young ants, and others defend the colony. Most ants we see are workers looking for food supplies and carrying food back to the nest. Ants enter buildings in search of food to take back to their nests. Any wandering ants found indoors should be killed to prevent them from establishing a trail into the building. If a trail of ants is found, watch them to determine where they are going and how they are getting into the building. Then seal the entryway, remove the food they are attracted to, and vacuum the ants to remove them. Vacuuming a small amount of cornstarch along with the ants will help to kill them inside the vacuum bag. Wash their 'trail' with soapy water to remove the scent that ants use to lead their nest mates to the food.

IPM ACTIONS FOR ANTS

FIRST ACTIONS

- § Inventory ant-prone areas for access points and food sources.
- § Clean floors, countertops and baseboards with 1:1 solution of vinegar water or other cleaning solution.
- § Have ants identified by your pest management professional. Different ant species will require different management strategies.

KEEP PESTS OUT

- § Exclude the invaders. Caulk cracks and any other places where ants might enter the building.
- § Use weather stripping to ensure tight fitting doors and windows.
- § Mend screening.
- § If ants created a 'trail' track them back to their access point. Wash with soapy water and seal with caulk.

- § Force relocation of ant hills in contact with the building by pouring hot soapy water on the mounds.
- § Remove pheromone trails.
Ants leave (like cockroaches and mice) leave behind pheromone trails that signal good food sources and harborage to others of its species. Remove these pheromone trails by cleaning with a 1:1 solution of vinegar water or other cleaning solutions.

REMOVE PESTS' FOOD & WATER

- § Minimize food supply.
- § Avoid leaving crumbs on counters.
- § Wipe up all food spills, especially syrupy materials.
- § Keep sugar and similar things in tightly covered containers.
- § Limit eating to one easily-cleaned part of the facility.

REDUCE PESTS' SHELTER

- § Locate the nest.
Most ant species have certain preferences for nesting sites (but they are highly adaptable in their nesting habits); therefore, knowing the species will help in the search for nests. You can usually locate the nest by closely observing the movement of the ants, particularly where they go after feeding. Outdoor nests often are marked by mounds of soil thrown up around the entrance. Some nests may be under pavement, next to foundation walls, or in decaying logs or tree trunks. Indoor nests may be located between the floor and subfloor, in the walls, behind baseboards, or under cracked basement floors. A pest management professional should be able to help.

MONITOR FOR PESTS

- § Place sticky cardboard traps or glue boards in areas where ants have been found in the past to provide early warning of new ant infestations.
- § Ask staff to report any and all ant sightings.

TREAT EXISTING PROBLEMS

NON CHEMICAL CONTROL OPTIONS:

- § Aggressively clean all surfaces where ant activity has been observed.
- § Use soap and water to squash and wipe away stray ants.

CHEMICAL CONTROL OPTIONS:

- § Avoid the urge to spray. Spraying can fragment the colony – leading to six smaller colony/nests instead of one large one. Several nests are more challenging to manage.
- § Work with a pest management professional to identify the ant species and create a management plan.
- § Use strategically placed pesticide stations containing tamper resistant baits that the ants take back to the nest. Food preferences of ants vary by species and can change daily depending on the nutritional requirements of the ant colony. Therefore, a good pest control professional will monitor the bait stations regularly to verify that the bait is effective.

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